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### THREE VASES IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, ILLUSTRATING WOMEN'S LIFE IN ATHENS

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THE daily life of Athenian women during the years that intervened between the rule of Pisistratus and the end of the Peloponnesian war is rendered familiar by countless representations on Attic vases. That it was not so monotonous as might be inferred from Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is attested by the diverse activities illustrated by the Greek potter. H. B. Walters, in his *History of Ancient Pottery*, II, pp. 172 ff., enumerates no less than thirty women's occupations depicted in vase-paintings. Household, toilet, and bridal scenes are in the majority, but women are also seen indulging in games and music, and, in a few instances, taking part in religious ceremonies. To Walters' list of games two may be added. The game of kottabos was played by women as well as by men, as is shown by scenes on vases in the British and Berlin Museums.<sup>1</sup> The finger game "*alla morra*" was also one of their pastimes, and is illustrated on a hydria in the Berlin Museum.<sup>2</sup>

In our attempt to reconstruct the life of the past, each new representation of a scene from that life is important either in verifying our present knowledge or in supplementing it by fresh facts. For this reason I take the opportunity of discussing three unpublished vases dealing with the life of the Athenian woman, all of which are now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. On one is depicted a household scene, — women conversing and working wool, a favorite subject with Greek vase-painters, but one that never grows monotonous, the scenes being always variously composed and illustrative of different

<sup>1</sup> *Catalogue of Greek and Etruscan Vases in the British Museum*, III, E 813; *Vasensammlung im Antiquarium*, 2416.

<sup>2</sup> *Vasensammlung im Antiquarium*, 2177.

aspects of the same occupation. On another are represented two women spinning tops. On the third is a scene which will,

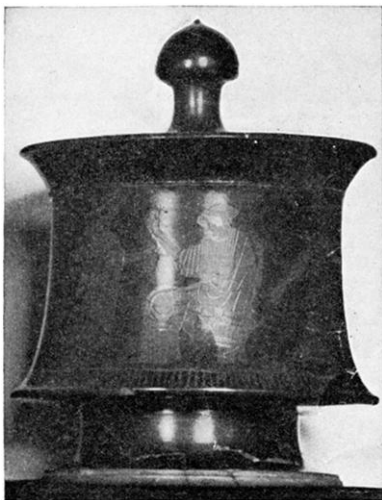


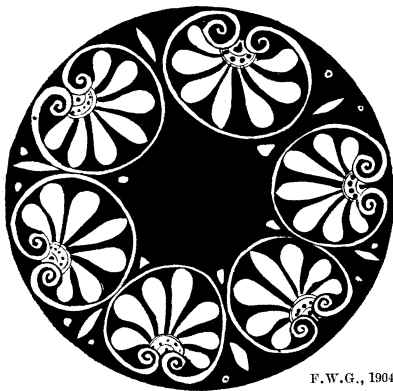
FIGURE 1. — PYXIS.

no doubt, be variously explained. The interpretation I shall suggest connects it with an important religious festival, and, if correct, would be of peculiar interest, since we are much in want of direct illustrations of the manifold literary evidence for the active part which women took in religious celebrations.

PYXIS. 06.1117 (Figs. 1, 2, and 3). Height without lid  $3\frac{1}{4}$  in. (8.2 cm.); with lid to the top of the button  $4\frac{3}{4}$  in. (12.1 cm.). Greatest diameter  $3\frac{3}{8}$  in. (9.2 cm.). On the lid, a pattern of enclosed palmettes. The design forms a frieze around the

body. The execution is of extreme delicacy and grace, and belongs to the period of about 460–440 B.C. Beneath the design is a band of tongue-pattern. Except for a few small chips which were broken from the base and replaced the vase is intact and in an admirable state of preservation.

The locality of the scene is indicated as the interior of a house by a fluted Ionic column on a plinth. To the right of this a woman, clothed in a short-sleeved chiton and mantle, and wearing a fillet in her hair, is conversing with another woman, who is clothed in a long-sleeved chiton, mantle, and *sakkos*, and is seated in a chair with a *kala-thos* beside her. The first woman holds a long fillet in her extended hands, as if offering it to the other, who holds up a flower in her right hand. The two women are evidently exchanging pres-



F.W.G., 1904.

FIGURE 2. — LID OF PYXIS.



F.W.G., 1904.

FIGURE 3. — SCENE ON PYXIS.

ents; the one nearest the column we may suppose to have just entered the apartment (note that she does not wear the *sakkos* as do the other women in the scene), and to be bringing her friend a small present, while the hostess is offering a flower in return, as a mark of welcome. The woman on the right, who is hurrying away from this group, also holds a flower in her right hand, while her left is raised as if in surprise. She is probably hastening to the other women to tell them of the arrival of their friend or to leave the two by themselves. With her back to this group a woman in a long-sleeved chiton, mantle, and *sakkos* is seated in a chair, holding in both hands a string of beads of the shape that often occurs on Greek vases. In front of her stands a woman, similarly clothed, engaged in spinning. In the accustomed way she holds up in her left hand the distaff (*ῥλακάτη*) with a hank of wool wound around it, to twist from it the thread between the thumb and first finger of her right hand. She is represented at the moment when she has drawn out a sufficient length of yarn, and is twisting it still more completely by twirling the spindle (*ἄτρακτος*), which she is holding over a *kalathos* filled with unworked wool. It is interesting to notice how clearly the several parts of the spindle are indicated. Above is the slit or catch (*ἄγκιστρον*) with the thread securely fixed in it; then

comes the stick or spindle proper, and into the lower extremity of this is inserted a whorl (σφόνδυλος), of which so many specimens have survived from antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

The scene is completed by the figure of another woman, clothed in a long-sleeved chiton and a *sakkos*, and seated in a chair. Her occupation is not so obvious as that of her companions. Her right leg is raised and supported upon a high foot-rest; she bends slightly forward and her expression indicates that she is devoting her entire attention to her task. This seems to be the winding of the wool into a skein. The lump of spun wool is on the ground; by passing the thread alternately between the second and third fingers, first of her right hand and then of her left, she is undoing the bobbin (πήνιον) she had formed on the spindle, and winding the thread into a skein. Her dress is tucked up above her knee, leaving bare the lower part of her leg, over which she is drawing the thread to prevent it from snarling. Just such another representation does not, to my knowledge, occur on Greek vases or elsewhere. The several processes of actual spinning are common enough; but the treatment of the wool, when once it is spun, is not often shown, though we know that it was eventually wound into a ball (ταλύτη, κλωστήρ), and balls of wool occur not infrequently in interior scenes.

LECYTHUS, G.R. 538, with bulbous body (Fig. 4). Height 6½ in. (17.3 cm.). Greatest diameter 4 in. (10.2 cm.). Between the neck and shoulder a strip of tongue-pattern; below the design egg-pattern. No white or purple is used in the design, which is of the period about 450–430 B.C. The vase is in a good state of preservation, except the glaze, which is much injured and has in places almost entirely disappeared.

Two women, each clothed in a long chiton of soft material and a himation of heavier texture, are engaged in spinning tops. The stick of the whip held by the woman on the left is clearly indicated; the lash (or lashes?) have disappeared. The stick of the other woman is mostly hidden by her body;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schliemann, *Troja*, p. 293. For the operation of spinning in antiquity cf. Yates in *Smith's Dict. Ant. s.v.* "fusus"; Blümner, *Techn. u. Term. der Gewerbe und Künste bei den Griechen und Römern*, I, p. 107, and H. Lafaye in *Daremberg and Saglio, Dict. Ant. s.v.* "fusus." For representations of the subject see the list of references mentioned by Hartwig in his *Meisterschalen*, p. 340, note 1, and Walters, *History of Ancient Pottery*, II, p. 173, note 5.

part of it is still visible near the curve of her shoulder, and it clearly extended a little farther, as is shown by some indistinct traces; the lashes attached to it have wholly disappeared, the surface being much injured just at this point. The woman on the left wears a *sakkos*.

Though the drawing of these figures is somewhat hasty and not carried out with the minute care which characterizes many vases of this period, it is very spirited. The intensity and physical exertion which both women bring to bear on their occupation are admirably expressed. Each woman places her left foot forward, letting her weight rest firmly on it, while the right foot is drawn back, ready at any time to change position, according to the



FIGURE 4. — LECYTHUS.

movements of the top; with one hand each gathers up her himation, to keep its voluminous folds from getting in the way; in the other each holds the whip, dealing vigorous blows at the tops which are spinning between them. The lively effect of the scene is further increased by the concentrated look with which each woman watches her own top.

Representations of this game are comparatively rare. In addition to the vase just described, I know of but three other instances in which the scene occurs. In one of these it is again a woman who is so occupied. This is the cylix in the van Branteghem Collection (Fröhner, *Catalogue*, No. 167, pl. 42) signed by Hegesiboulos. Here the woman is similarly clothed in chiton, himation, and *sakkos*, and holds a whip with two lashes. The design, which is painted in diluted glaze on a white ground, is lifelike, but there is none of the dash and

vigor that we find in the figures of our lecythus. A bearded man spinning a top occurs on a cylix in Baltimore,<sup>1</sup> and a youth evidently thus occupied, on a cylix in Berlin.<sup>2</sup>

It is noteworthy that while this game is with us played only by children, with the Greeks it seems to have been practised by grown-up people. The fact that we find women engaged in it is especially interesting and shows us that Greek women did by no means abstain from games requiring active physical exercise.

We possess a number of ancient tops found in the Kabeirion near Thebes,<sup>3</sup> presumably placed there as votive offerings, since the word *στροβίλον* occurs in a list of dedicatory offerings found on that site. These tops are mostly of terracotta; some, of very small dimensions, are of bronze.

COTYLE. 06.1021.181 (Figs. 5 and 7). Height 7 in. Greatest diameter, without handles  $7\frac{5}{8}$  in. (19.3 cm.), with handles  $12\frac{3}{8}$  in. (32 cm.). A raised gilt surface is used for jewelry and for the object on the lap of the seated woman. Round the lip, egg-pattern; beneath the handles, pattern of palmettes and scrolls. The design belongs to an advanced stage of the "graceful period," probably about 430–420 B.C., when the drawing is minute and delicate, with very thin inner markings in diluted glaze, and when gilt is used freely for accessories, but washes of white have not yet been introduced.

On one side (Fig. 5) is represented in the centre a woman seated on a four-legged stool; she is clothed in a thin chiton, which has fallen from her right shoulder, leaving the upper part of her body nude; on her head she has a *sphendone*; she also wears earrings, necklace, and bracelet. With both hands she holds on her lap an object which is occupying her whole attention; its special significance will be discussed later. In front of her stands another woman, clothed in chiton and himation, and wearing a bracelet, necklace, and earrings as well as a fillet in her hair. She is holding her himation with her left hand; her right is raised over the object on her companion's lap. It is unfortunate that just beneath her hand are several breaks, various fragments having been pieced together; thus part of the surface has been chipped away and afterwards filled in with black by the restorer. Whether,

<sup>1</sup> P. Hartwig, *Die Griechischen Meisterschalen*, pl. lxxvii, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hartwig, *op. cit.*, pl. xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ath. Mitt.* 1888, pp. 426–427.

therefore, there were originally any further indications of what her raised hand was doing, cannot be ascertained. Close behind this woman stands a satyr, his right hand raised, his left lowered. He is nude and wears a gilt band in his hair. Behind the woman in the centre is the figure of a nude winged Eros, leaning with his left elbow on her shoulder; he also wears a gilt band in his hair. Approaching the central



FIGURE 5. — FRONT OF COTYLE.

group from the left is a young woman, clothed in a chiton with diploidion, and wearing earrings and a necklace; she is looking toward the central group.

The interest of the scene is evidently centred in the object on the seated woman's lap. The exact use and meaning of objects of this kind have long been a puzzle to archaeologists. They do not appear frequently, but the explanations offered by those who have discussed the vases on which they do occur have been most varied. It may be of advantage to collect the evidence supplied by the other vases, and see whether this does not suggest a satisfactory explanation.

Besides the cotyle just described, there are to my knowledge six vases on which this object occurs.

(1) An aryballus in the British Museum (E 697), representing "Aphrodite and her following." Here a woman, inscribed



Peitho, is occupied with putting sprigs of olive into the up-rights of such an object. Mr. Cecil Smith, in the *Catalogue of Greek and Etruscan Vases in the British Museum*, III, calls it "an open-work basket of fruits (?)." Stackelberg, in his *Gräber der Hellenen*, pl. xxix, called it "*ein bacchischer Dreifuss ohne Lebes*." Furtwängler, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, pl. 78, 2, speaks of it as "*ein Gerät das im Aphroditekultus eine Rolle spielte und wahrscheinlich ein Kohlenbecken zum Räuchern ist*."

(2) A lecane from Kertsch in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, on which are represented various scenes from the gynaeceum. Here such an object, entirely gilt, is seen standing on the

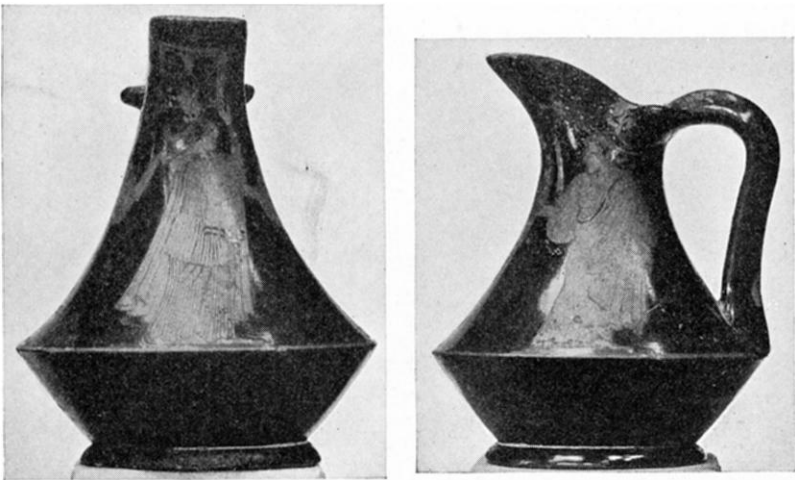


FIGURE 6.—OENOCHOË IN BERLIN.

ground. Stephani, *Compte Rendu*, 1860, pl. 1, p. 38, and in his catalogue of the Hermitage vases, No. 1791, calls it "*ein eigenthümliches, reich vergoldetes Gerät, dessen Bestimmung sich noch in keiner Weise feststellen lässt*." In his *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, II, pl. 68, Furtwängler recognizes its similarity to the object on the British Museum aryballus and gives the same explanation of its use, *i.e.* calls it a "*Kohlenbecken zum Räuchern*," a brazier for burning incense.

(3) An oenochoe in the Berlin Museum (Fig. 6), where three girls are represented, one carrying a similar object on her head. Furtwängler, *Vasensammlung im Antiquarium*,

No. 2189, calls the whole subject "*Zug dreier Mädchen (zu sacraler Handlung?)*," and speaks of the object itself as *ein durchbrochenes Stabgestell mit drei Löwenklauen als Fuss*. In the *Museo Chiusino*, pl. 68, it is called a "*cista che racchiudeva oggetti sacri di mistica rappresentanza, non visibile ad ogni profano*." In the *Élite Céramographique*, IV, pl. 28, p. 160, the suggestion is made that the subject may represent three Arrhephori in the Panathenaic procession, and the object is called "*une espèce de grande corbeille*." In this vase a part of the mouth, including the upper part of the object in question, is wrongly restored and the latter does not, therefore, closely correspond in shape with the other stands. The lower part, however, which is original, is exactly the same as in the other instances and leaves no doubt of the identity of the object. Both in the *Élite Céramographique* and in the *Museo Chiusino* the reproduction of this scene, which was made from a drawing, is so poor and inexact that the vase has been reproduced here from a photograph.<sup>1</sup>

(4) A lecanē published by Dumont and Chaplain, *Ceram. de la Grèce propre*, pls. xxxviii–xxxix, where the same object, profusely gilt, occurs on the lap of a woman. Its use here is left unexplained.

(5) A small loutrophoros, published in Stackelberg, *Gräber der Hellenen*, pl. xxx. Here, what perhaps is the same object again occurs on the lap of a woman. The latter is described as occupied "*mit der Bereitung eines Korbes aus goldenen Zweigen*."

(6) A lekane recently found at Kertsch and published by B. Pharmakowsky, *Arch. Anz.*, 1907, cols. 134 ff., Figs. 3–7. He calls the representation "*eine bekannte Scene der Frauentoilette*." In the centre is seated a female figure surrounded by Erotes, and from both sides approach women carrying vases, garments, taenia, and so forth. One of these women is holding the object in question. Pharmakowsky does not attempt to explain it, and only says "*die Bedeutung des Gerätes ist nicht klar*."

It will be seen from the above that the interpretations hitherto offered for the use of this object show a great variety. The object, which might be described as a framework of broad bands joined by crossing strings or narrower bands

<sup>1</sup> For the photographs I am indebted to Dr. R. Zahn.

and resting on a bottom with three feet, must have been intimately connected with some occupation practised by women, since it is among them that it always occurs. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in all the instances cited it is invariably handled by well-born women, not handmaids. It must have been of gold or gilt, since it always appears so whenever gilt accessories are used. It could be placed on the ground, held on the lap, or carried on the head. The fact that it was carried on the head in what seems to be a procession on the Berlin vase (No. 3, above) suggests the idea that it was used in some women's ritual. Furtwängler, as we have seen, thought it was connected with the cult of Aphrodite, basing his opinion chiefly on the scene on the aryballus in the British Museum (No. 1, above). The scene on our cotyle, however, throws new light on the subject. Here, in a scene which is ostensibly in a woman's apartment, is introduced the figure of a satyr. The natural explanation of his presence is that the scene in question is connected with a cult in which satyrs played an important part; in fact, it suggests that we have here women preparing for the Dionysia, one of the most important festivals celebrated in Athens. This possibility is strengthened when we recall the words of the scholiast on Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 242: *κατὰ τὴν τῶν Διονυσίων ἑορτὴν παρὰ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις αἱ εὐγενεῖς παρθέναι ἐκανηφόρουν. ἦν δὲ ἐκ χρυσοῦ πεποιημένα τὰ κανᾶ, ἐφ' ὧν τὰς ἀπαρχὰς ἀπάντων ἐτίθεσαν.* ("At the Dionysiac festival in Athens the well-born maidens carried baskets made of gold, in which they placed first-fruits of all kinds.") The reference here is to the *Διονύσια τὰ ἐν ἄστει*, celebrated in the city itself in the month Elaphebolion (March–April). One of the chief features of this celebration was the procession which accompanied the image of Dionysus to a small temple situated outside the city.<sup>1</sup> The *κανηφόροι*, mentioned by the scholiast, formed part of this procession, which we know to have been fitted out with great pomp. The selection of the maidens for this *πομπή* was one of the archon's duties.

We have already seen that during the period when gilt accessories were in use the objects on the vases discussed are always gilded; also that they are invariably handled by

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mommsen, *Feste der Stadt Athen*, pp. 436 ff.

εὐγενεῖς παρθένου, and that, at least in one case, a woman appears actually carrying one on her head. It may be argued that the object is unlike the ordinary *κανοῦν*, or basket, which occurs on Greek vases. But if, indeed, it was used for carrying first-fruits in a procession, the fact that the sides were left open made it more appropriate, since then the offerings could be seen by all. In the scene on the British Museum aryballus we actually see some fruits placed in this object, which has made Mr. Cecil Smith suggest that it was "a basket of fruits." A few choice products, placed in a beautiful receptacle and carried so that all could behold them and be grateful for the bountiful goodness of the gods, was what the occasion demanded. Into the uprights of the stands we may suppose were put branches, as indicated by the fact that on the British Museum aryballus Peitho is engaged in sticking branches into the uprights of the "basket." The appropriateness of her occupation is clear if the object was used for carrying first-fruits; but how could we explain her action, if, with Professor Furtwängler, we took it to be a "*Kohlenbecken zum Räuchern*"?

On the vase recently found at Kertsch (No. 6, above) we may suppose that the figure in the centre is one of the girls who is to join the procession. Her friends assist her in her toilet, and bring her the various requisites needed for the occasion. Or, if we accept A. Brueckner's interpretation of such scenes,<sup>1</sup> this may be a representation of the festival of Aphrodite when the newly married women went up to the goddess to bring gifts as thank-offerings. We know that on that occasion a bride would dedicate the girdle she had worn last when still a maiden, as well as other appropriate articles. Is it not possible that the gold basket she had carried in "the procession of maidens" was also deemed a suitable offering?

In the scene on the cotyle in the Metropolitan Museum it would seem that the basket is being prepared for the procession. As has already been pointed out, the surface around the right hand of the woman standing before the object has been restored, and we cannot, therefore, say exactly what she is doing. She is perhaps occupied in decking out the basket, or may be in the act of placing something in it.

<sup>1</sup> *Ath. Mitt.* 1907, p. 112.

The scene on the back of our vase (Fig. 7) is evidently subsidiary, but its connection with the principal picture is shown by the satyr who is seated on the extreme right, holding a thyrsus in his left hand and leaning his weight on his right. He is looking toward the group in the centre. This



FIGURE 7.—BACK OF COTYLE.

consists of a seated woman, clothed in chiton and himation, and wearing a necklace, earrings, bracelets, and diadem, conversing with an attendant who stands in front of her. The latter is clothed in a long-sleeved, dotted garment and a tight-fitting cap; like her mistress she wears a necklace, bracelet, and earrings. It is interesting to notice, by the way, that the woman in the centre is seated on a square box of the shape which occurs not infrequently on Attic vases and is also identical with the seats of the so-called Demeter and Kore of the Eastern pediment of the Parthenon.<sup>1</sup>

GISELA M. A. RICHTER.

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

<sup>1</sup> The identity of the seats of the "Demeter and Kore" of the Parthenon with the square boxes which occur on Attic fifth-century vases was first pointed out by Furtwängler (*Griechische Vasenmalerei*, I, p. 215). Studniczka's assertion (*Jb. Arch. I.* 1904, pp. 1 ff.) that these were identical with the round cistae of Demeter and, therefore, prove the statues to be Demeter and Kore, has been opposed by Furtwängler (*Aegina*, p. 332, note 1).